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## History as a Weapon: Second World War Imagery in the Ongoing Russian–Ukrainian Cyberwar

### Abstract

The article focuses on the characteristics of military posters employed as an element of the ongoing Russia–Ukrainian hybrid war in the Donbas region. The paper also examines the functions which posters fulfil in times of military conflict and analyses the role which posters play in persuading and mobilizing society, recruiting soldiers, and maintaining high morale among troops. The research material includes posters that were exhibited in 2014–2017, when the most significant battles took place. The article focuses on the verbal aspects of the posters as well as on the visual constructions of “friends” and “foes”. Furthermore, this investigation analyses the Second World War (WWII) images and symbols that have been used in both pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian posters.

**Keywords:** poster; propaganda; “friend/foe” opposition; WWII images; historical past; hate speech

*We cannot win war using only art.  
The war is won with weapons. It is a fact.  
But art is a moral vitamin for soldiers.*

Andrii Prymachenko,  
the author of the poster “Ukrainian Spring”

## 1 Introduction and Background

In the twentieth century, and during the two world wars in particular, the poster became a popular channel of mass communication, as well as a means of self-identification (Baker, 1990). In Germany (Rigby, 1984), the USA (Vogt, 2001) and the USSR (Avramenko, 2010), posters influenced the minds and worldviews of millions of people. Soviet posters recruited young women into the armed forces, announced the call-to-arms for able-bodied young men, and showed images of the horrors of the Fascist invasion. The same methods have been applied in the context of the Donbas war by both sides of the conflict since “the function of the war poster is to make coherent and acceptable a basically incoherent and irrational ordeal of killing, suffering, and destruction that violates every accepted principle of morality and decent living” (as cited in Bredhoff, 1994).

To prove effective, these posters must catch and hold the viewer’s attention. Most posters concerning the ongoing Ukrainian–Russian conflict appeal to powerful human emotions. Furthermore, these posters use the same messages which were popular during the Second World War. For

example, the glorification of the past, the dehumanization of the enemy and the concept of the “Great Victory” is crucial in these pieces of art.

Victory Day is a public holiday in the Russian Federation which commemorates the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany and remembers those killed in the years 1941–1945. However, the rhetoric associated with Victory Day has shifted. According to Kendal Gee, the strategic goals behind Russian propaganda are to establish the concept of a “Greater Russia”, to perpetuate Euro-scepticism and to establish Russian national identity outside Russia. Victory Day offers the perfect opportunity to exercise power in order to promote these ideologies throughout Eastern Europe (Gee, 2018). The speeches of President Vladimir Putin focus on celebrating victory, rather than remembering those who lost their lives. In 2017, Putin appealed to national pride by saying, “We feel a penetrating consanguineous relationship with the generation of heroes and winners” (Gavrilenko et al., 2017). These words mark a shift away from viewing Victory Day as a tragedy and fit the narrative of Russia as a world power (Kolesnikov, 2019).

In order to offer an in-depth analysis of the topic, various online sources, posters presented during exhibitions in Donetsk (2017), and posters by Ukrainian and Russian artists prepared for the exhibitions *Ukrainian Patriotic Posters* (2014–2015), *Junta und Vata* (2015), and *Art-Kyiv Contemporary* (2014) have been used. This article aims to consider the role of military posters in the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian cyberwar and focuses on the analysis of the verbal part (text) and the paralinguistic part (images) of the posters.

This article implements the methodology of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which examines the use of a language in relation to power, ideology, politics, culture and identity (Rahimi & Riasati, 2011). Moreover, a multimodal discourse approach (MDA) that involves the interaction and cooperation of linguistics and semiotics has been used. It explains how meanings arising from the integrated usage of language and image are constructed in modern war posters, as a poster is only partially of a linguistic nature. Multimodal texts may be defined as “the combination of different modes which serves the purposes of creating meaning in an effective way” (O’Halloran & Smith, 2011, p. 50). Ademilokun and Olateju note that “multimodal texts are becoming popular in political discourse, protest discourse and discourse of civic engagement among many others” (Ademilokun & Olateju, 2016, p. 2).

This study, therefore, requires an interdisciplinary approach. The main tasks of this paper are as follows: 1) to demonstrate how events from the past and WWII images influence the creation of posters in the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian war; 2) to reveal the discursive and semiotic patterns of representing “self” versus “others”, and constructing the image of a “friend” and “foe” within the military conflict; 3) to analyse the main aims of the “DPR/LPR” (Donetsk People’s Republic/Luhansk People’s Republic) posters and Ukrainian posters.

## 2 Theoretical Approaches to Analysing Posters

In the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the authors define a poster as a printed paper announcement or advertisement which is exhibited publicly. Whether promoting a product, an event, or a sentiment (such as patriotism), a poster must immediately catch the attention of the passer-by (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Since language and image complement each other in posters, these elements should be analysed together (Ostanina-Olszewska & Majdzińska-Koczorowicz, 2019, p. 2). Kress and van Leeuwen treat forms of communication employing images as seriously as linguistic forms, because of the overwhelming evidence of the importance of visual communication (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 17). Having applied MDA, which focuses on “how meaning is made through the use of multiple communication models” (Cheng & Liu, 2014, p. 191), both visual images and verbal, the combination of a linguistic text (slogans) and a non-linguistic text (image) is required in the analysis of the selected posters.

Hridina states that a poster is “a kind of a graph, a single piece of art, made for propaganda, advertising, or educational purposes” (Hridina, 2010, p. 136). After World War I began in 1914, the

poster became a piece of art that was able to impact on both history and people's consciousness. Posters were used for propaganda purposes in order to spread messages among the masses. At that time, as it still is today, it was believed that colours and shapes have a direct psychological influence on people's emotions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 30). In this regard, Fairclough states that language is used in social relations in order to establish power differences and to reproduce ideologies, because ideology is a mechanism of power in modern society (Fairclough, 2002).

Rods emphasizes that it may be difficult for one to find time to read a newspaper or a brochure, listen to the radio, watch movies, or attend rallies and demonstrations. However, bright, easily memorable drawings with concise slogans could be seen on every street. It occurred that people gradually began to memorize the necessary ideas and subconsciously began to implement them (Rods, 2008, p. 22). In addition to their ideological influence, posters have other advantages. Firstly, they can reach different layers of society, regardless of their level of education. Secondly, the poster requires neither a tremendous amount of time nor significant resources to be produced. Thus, the study of posters helps to reveal the features of military propaganda and to understand how opposing sides perceive each other, and shows the methods applied to constructing the image of the enemy. In addition to this, military art "can provide society with a collective memory and an appreciation of war and the individuals involved" (Wilcott, 2013, p. 5), as well as be used as a mode of persuasion.

Anderson argues that the purpose of war art is not only to emphasize socio-political problems, but also to transform views and reality by its power, "At its best, war art is witness to the power of word and image and for the human craving for meaning. And if one of the functions of art is to disturb the status quo, to force us to view the world anew, to consider our capacities to build or tear down, then we must welcome those disturbances" (Anderson, 2008). Having examined more than two hundred WWII posters, Judd outlined their main functions and divided them into such categories as recruitment, nationalist propaganda, patriotic posters, national security and safety, war production/finance, morale boosting, and ridiculing and vilifying the enemy (Judd, 1973).

Having analysed Soviet propaganda posters, Çakı and Gazi show that "the idea of the Russian people as a warrior society was constructed using the images of historical Russian personalities and referring to their words in propaganda posters. At the same time, the posters conveyed the message that the Soviet troops would repeat the same victories, reminding the people of Russian triumphs of the past" (Çakı & Gazi, 2018, p. 291). The same concept proved crucial in a new "anti-fascist" Russian idea: it ranged from official discourse and diplomatic rhetoric to mass media, artistic production, memory studies, and the creation of academic history (Fedor et al., 2017, p.15). Additionally, it is widely used in the current Russian and pro-Russian posters that are investigated in the following section.

### 3 "LPR" / "DPR" Posters: Allusions to WWII Imagery and Nostalgia for the Soviet Past

Since the beginning of the war in Donbas seven years ago, posters have played an integral role in the conflict, being an important propaganda tool. In 2017, two exhibitions took place in Donetsk. The first one was devoted to posters from WWII, and more than 50 posters were brought from Saint Petersburg to Donetsk. They were intended to arouse hatred of the enemy: the Nazis in the posters were depicted either as demonic creatures or were caricatured. Nataliia Koval', the representative of the Ministry of Culture of the "DPR" (Donetsk People's Republic / Donets'ka Narodna Respublika), mentioned in an interview that "posters of that time (World War II — *Author*) have something in common with the contemporary ones" (*V Donetske*, 2017). She underlined that contemporary works "should support the spirit of the DPR warriors and civilians as well as instil confidence in their victory" (*V Donetske*, 2017).



**Figure 1.** Rus: *Rabotat' v tylu kak na fronte. Kazhdaia tonna — udar po vragu* [To work behind the lines is the same as on the frontline. Every ton is a blow to the enemy.] (left)  
 Rus: *Stalinskie sokoly, beite zarvavshysia fashistskich piratov* [Stalinist falcons, beat presumptuous Nazi pirates] (V Donetsk, 2017) (middle).<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 2.** Rus: *Ubeĭ fashista-izuvera!* [Kill the fascist bigot!] (left) (V Donetsk, 2017).<sup>2</sup>

Almost every poster urges the audience to act in a certain way. Moreover, the posters' messages boast a straightforward and persuasive style, with exclamatory sentences showing strong feelings and emotions. For example, “Beat the fascist raiders!” or “Kill the fascist bigot!”. Imperative sentences are used to convey a command. Sometimes, a command begins with a noun of direct address, for example, “Komsomol members!” The call to action is often the best way to determine the poster's purpose.

In order to continue the tradition of the World War II posters, an exhibition of young “DPR” artists and designers was organized in Donetsk. The authors urged viewers to defend the “homeland” from the Ukrainian “junta”. By labelling the post-revolutionary<sup>3</sup> Ukrainian government as a “fascist junta,” the Russian Federation was able to depict Ukrainian leaders as German-style fascists. Sokol says that it was “a savvy, if immoral, move on the post-Soviet arena, where the memory of the World War II is still a potent political force” (Sokol, 2019). In the words of the historian Koposov, collective memory, based on the cult of World War II, was used to justify new acts of violence and current wars (as cited in Sokol, 2019).

It should be noted that many of the contemporary posters had allusions to WWII art, and were sometimes almost exact copies of them. The negative depiction of the Ukrainian Army stands in contrast to the positive portrayal of Russian or “DPR” soldiers. The construction of the opponent's image in modern memes, as well as in posters, is also “based on the exaggeration of negative personality traits, stereotypes and rumours” (Pidkuimukha & Kiss, 2020, p. 21). Ukrainian soldiers are depicted as fascists. The Kremlin has been labelling its enemies as fascists for many years, seldom accurately but often quite successfully.

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://novosti.dn.ua/news/273934-v-donecke-pokazyvayut-agytacyonnye-plakaty-o-voyne#>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://novosti.dn.ua/news/273934-v-donecke-pokazyvayut-agytacyonnye-plakaty-o-voyne#>

<sup>3</sup> The Revolution in Ukraine in 2014 (also known as Euromaidan or Revolution of Dignity).





**Figure 3.** Rus: *Ochistim nashu zemliu ot hitlerovskoi nechisti!* [Rid our land of the Hitlerite scum!] (left) (V Donetsk, 2017)

Rus: *Komsomol'tsy! Uchites' nastoichivo voennomu delu! Khrabro, muzhestvenno srazhaïtes' s vragom do polnoy pobedy* [Komsomol members! Study warfare tirelessly! Fight the enemy bravely and courageously until our ultimate victory] (middle)

Rus: *Razgromim fashistskikh naletchikov!* [Beat the fascist raiders!] (right).<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 4.** Rus: *Riadovoï den' gosudarstvennogo deiatelia Ukrainy* [An ordinary day of a Ukrainian statesman] (left)

Rus: *Sokhrani imena tekh, kto sokhranil tebe zhizn'. Bessmertnyi polk DNR.* [Save the names of those who saved your life. Immortal Regiment of DPR.] (right).<sup>5</sup>

The left-hand poster in figure 4 is a copy of the World War II poster *An ordinary day of a modern German statesman*. For a more profound impact, the artist used silhouetted images. The only detail that distinguishes these two posters (Figure 4 and Figure 5) is a blue and yellow flag on the person's sleeve to indicate that the man is a Ukrainian citizen. Russian and pro-Russian propaganda routinely describe the government of Ukraine as “a radical and ‘fascist’ minority”, and so such images are rather predictable. Propaganda posters use common and easily understood symbols that are familiar to the general public. These symbols are used to represent important concepts and ideas. For instance, the skull and blood symbolize death and mortality. It is emphasized that a Ukrainian statesman, like a German statesman during WWII, is killing people and is enjoying it. Nowadays, Russian propaganda claims that the Ukrainian authorities are killing their own people and this poster aims to stress that there is a “civil war in Ukraine”.

Each year on Victory Day, millions of people in Russia march with portraits of their relatives who fought in World War II. They are called the Immortal Regiment and it memorializes those who participated in the Great Patriotic War, as the conflict is known by Russians. Critics of this tradition have accused the authorities of co-opting the tradition to promote patriotism and power, instead of commemorating the country's war dead, of whom the Soviet Union lost millions. The poster in figure 4 (right) uses the same slogans (“Save the names of those who saved your life”) in order to equate the veterans of World War II to “DPR” soldiers.

<sup>4</sup> Source: <http://novosti.dn.ua/news/273934-v-donecke-pokazyvayut-agytacyonnye-plakaty-o-voyne#>

<sup>5</sup> Source: <https://kulturologia.ru/blogs/080615/24797/>



**Figure 5.** Rus: *Riadvoy den' gosudarstvennogo deiatelia Germanii* [An ordinary day of a Germany statesman].<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 6.** Rus: *Bili, b'ëm i budem bit'!* [We won, we are winning and we will win!].<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 7.** Rus: *Bili, b'ëm i budem bit'!* [We won, we are winning and we will win!].<sup>8</sup>

The poster above on the right is similar to the poster *We won, we are winning, and we will win!* (1941), created by Vladimir Serov, Soviet painter and graphic artist (see Figure 7). In order to refer to past battles (“We won...”), the artist depicts the Battle on the Ice<sup>9</sup> in the left-hand section of the poster. Having analysed posters from the Second World War, Çakı and Gazi state that “giving the message that the Russian people are descended from a heroic nation, Soviet propaganda wanted the same heroism to be realized against the German soldiers” (Çakı & Gazi, 2018, p. 298). “The message that Nevsky defeated the German soldiers in 1242 together with his men was used together with the message that the Soviet soldiers would defeat the Germans again in 1942” (Çakı & Gazi, 2018, p. 300). In the right-hand section of the poster, a Soviet soldier is killing a German soldier. It is challenging to distinguish the two soldiers because they look very similar. Symbols, however, help to understand which side each of them is fighting for. A Swastika shows that one soldier belongs to the German army, and a five-pointed star symbolizes the Red Army.

The poster in Figure 6 clearly refers to Serov’s poster and by doing so compares victory in World War II with military actions in the Donbas region. Moreover, the language of the poster meets the requirements of propaganda posters. It is simple and its short catchphrases attract attention and are quickly remembered. The repetition of the verb ‘to win’ in the past, present, and future tenses is used to underline past victories, to emphasize power and strength, and to make the enemy feel scared.

<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://novosti.dn.ua/news/269201-v-donecke-pokazaly-kak-studenty-agytyruiut-za-dnr#>

<sup>7</sup> Source: <http://novosti.dn.ua/news/269201-v-donecke-pokazaly-kak-studenty-agytyruiut-za-dnr#>

<sup>8</sup> Source: <https://www.prilib.ru/item/320281>

<sup>9</sup> The Battle on the Ice took place on Lake Peipus between the forces of the Republic of Novgorod and the Livonian Order and Bishopric of Dorpat on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, 1242. The battle is known for taking place on the frozen lake, which gave the battle its name. It is one of the Days of Military Honors — special memorable dates in the Russian Armed Forces dedicated to the most prominent victories during different periods.

The poster in Figure 8 refers to WWII military paintings in which the decisive facial expression of a woman was the main feature (Shalyhina, 2009, p. 135). In Soviet propaganda posters, women were put on a par with men and were depicted as being both physically and morally strong. Figure 9 is reminiscent of the poster *The motherland is calling you* (Toidze, Iraklii M., 1941) below.



Figure 8.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 9.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 9 shows a peasant woman with short hair clad in a red cloak holding the Red Army oath in one hand and raising her other hand behind her triumphantly. In the background, dozens of weapons frame her defiant stance. The “DPR” poster in Figure 8 also bears a resemblance to the WWII poster *Fascism, the Deadliest Enemy of Women* (Vitolina, N., 1941). With her arms flung open and her wide stance, the woman in this poster recalls Hersilia, the woman who charges into the midst of the battle in David’s *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (Sherwin, 2017).

The Russian Federation and the self-proclaimed republics of DPR and LPR use similar methods and principles of poster propaganda to those used in Soviet propaganda posters in WWII. They cover a similar variety of topics to posters from the USSR, contrasting Russian strength and power to its enemies’ cruelty. In addition to these thematic similarities, Russian propaganda occasionally uses the same posters that were created during WWII, with only some minor changes or updates.

#### 4 Ukrainian Propaganda Posters in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: From Cossack Myths to WWII

In Ukraine, as in the “DPR”, several exhibitions of military posters have taken place. On March 31 2015, the exhibition *Junta und Vata* presented works by the Ukrainian artist Ivan Semesiuk and the Russian painter Anton Chads’kyi that depict two archetypal heroes of the modern mythological dimensions of Ukraine and Russia — “banderyk”<sup>12</sup> and “vatnyk”.<sup>13</sup> Also in 2015, the exhibition *100 best Patriotic Posters* was held in the M17 Contemporary Art Centre. The first gallery was

<sup>10</sup> <http://novosti.dn.ua/news/269201-v-donecke-pokazaly-kak-studenty-agytyruyut-za-dnr#>

<sup>11</sup> Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/746471706968329941/>

<sup>12</sup> *Banderyk* (*banderivets*) — with this token, Russian propaganda characterizes all supporters and defenders of Ukraine’s independence (Kuz’o, 2018, p. 8).

<sup>13</sup> *Vatnyk* — a political slur referring to anybody supporting Russia.



dedicated to posters showing the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, the comparison of Ukraine and Russia, the glorification of the Cossack spirit, and the exposure of the dark sides of the Russian Federation. In the second gallery, however, the posters were more positive and humorous.

Developed in close connection with the posters of other Soviet republics, Ukrainian military posters have retained their unique palette of folklore symbols, and images of unbroken historical spirit. Since the Cossack past symbolizes power and honour, and an awakening of national consciousness and the struggle for liberation, there are a series of modern military posters that make reference to the Cossack Era. This image was actively used during World War II, when “red” revolutionaries were identified with famous Cossacks and hetmans.

Having analysed Ukrainian Soviet propaganda posters that spread in Ukraine in 1941–1945, Koliada remarks that Ukrainian artists repeatedly referred to the heroic past of Ukraine, evidenced by A. Shcheglov’s work *Kozak Mamai* and I. Kruzhkov’s *Go forward, brave descendants of Bohdan!* (1943) (Koliada & Maievskyy, 2012, p. 360). By depicting Cossacks on WWII posters, the painters identified the “red” revolutionary with famous Cossacks, thus romanticizing the image of the Soviet proletariat, and idealizing the revolution (Avramenko, 2010, p. 68).

Modern Ukrainian artists have referred to the image of Cossack Mamay, who is a symbol of national identity and “the people’s ideal of the defender of freedom” (as cited in Chorna, 2007, p. 59). Cossack Mamay is one of the most prevalent characters in Ukrainian painting, usually portrayed with a *kobza* — a lute-like Ukrainian folk music instrument that symbolizes the Ukrainian national soul. Since 2014, after the Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine started, Cossack Mamay began to oppose images of Russian propaganda. In modern military posters, Mamay is pictured with an assault rifle instead of a *kobza* (see Figure 10).



Figure 10.<sup>14</sup>

The image of the Cossack is also used when depicting Ukrainian soldiers. In Figure 11, a soldier with both organic and biomechanical body parts is shown. Although he is portrayed as a human being with visibly mechanical parts, specific Ukrainian features of the Baroque style such as the topknot and moustache refer to the past. Figure 12 shows a sword and shield, also belonging to the attributes of the Baroque era that are associated with Cossack savagery, the awakening of national consciousness, and the struggle for liberation. In addition, the statement “Slaves are not allowed into paradise” belongs to Ivan Sirko, the Kish *otaman* (a chief officer of the Kish, or central body of government) of the Zaporizhian Sich and the whole Zaporizhian Lowland Army.

<sup>14</sup> Source: <https://io.ua/29552551> (Photo by Olha Trokhymchuk)



Figure 11. Ukr: *Kiborhy*<sup>15</sup> [Cyborgs].<sup>16</sup>



Figure 12. Ukr: *Rabiv do raiu ne puskaiut'* [Slaves are not allowed into paradise].<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, modern Ukrainian military posters use portraits of prominent Ukrainian writers and poets such as Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, and Ivan Franko, as well as passionate lines of their poetry. Figure 13 exploits the image of Lesya Ukrainka who held feminist views and sided with the working people. She repeatedly wrote and said that working people should unite in the struggle for their interests. This poster is reminiscent of the well-known American poster *We can do it!* (J. Howard Miller, 1942), which became a celebrated symbol of female patriotism and a major element of the feminist movement after WWII. The bright yellow painting which depicts a strong woman in working clothes and a red scarf, encouraging her fellow ladies to take wartime jobs in defence industries, was used as a “symbol of patriotic womanhood” (National Archives, n.d.). According to Kılıçkaya Boğ, “her red dotted scarf also gains a symbolic meaning of feminine power, bravery and the changing situation of gendered roles” (Kılıçkaya Boğ, 2018, p. 8).



Figure 13. Ukr: *Kh\*ia vam, a ne nen'ku!* [F\*ck you, you don't get a motherland!].<sup>18</sup>



Figure 14.<sup>19</sup>

The Soviet artist V. Kas'ian created a series of posters entitled *The anger of Shevchenko — weapons of victory* (1942–1943). He depicted the Kobzar (an alternative name for Shevchenko, *kobzar* meaning ‘bard’ in English) in order to embody the feelings of bitterness and furious hatred of enemies. Being the most mythologized and the most popular historical figure in Ukraine, the

<sup>15</sup> During the battle for Donetsk airport (Sept 2014 – Jan 22, 2015), the lexical item cyborg was applied to portray the Ukrainian soldiers who were defending the airport. Almost without any support and with little sleep, they were able to fend off incessant attacks by “DPR” forces. They thus reminded the public of “superheroes”, and “indestructible half-men, half-machines”.

<sup>16</sup> Source: <https://io.ua/29552521> (Photo by Olha Trokhymchuk)

<sup>17</sup> Source: <https://io.ua/29552524> (Photo by Olha Trokhymchuk)

<sup>18</sup> Source: <https://io.ua/29552528> (Photo by Olha Trokhymchuk)

<sup>19</sup> Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/383509724519429626/>

image of Taras Shevchenko has been used during both the Revolution of Dignity and the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian war. In 2015, as part of the radio marathon *Shevchenko mobilizes*, a poster depicting the poet in Ukrainian military uniform was created. It has become a generalized symbol of struggle. The author of this poster emphasized that “this portrait of Shevchenko had a mobilizing, propaganda nature that corresponds to the purpose of the radio marathon. It was intended to support the spirit of the defenders of Ukraine, to consolidate Ukrainians in the fight against external aggression” (Tumanova, 2015).



**Figure 15.** Ukr: *Ministerstvo kul'tury Ukraïny, Natsional'na radiokompaniia Ukraïny, 9 bereznia 2015 roku, Natsional'nyi radiomarafon “Boritesia — poborete”* (top), *Shevchenko mobilizuiє* (bottom) [Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, National Radio Company of Ukraine, March 9, 2015, National radio marathon “Fight — and you will win” (top), Shevchenko mobilizes (bottom)].<sup>20</sup>

Mobilizing posters, calling on people to help supply the army by becoming mobilized active soldiers, were widely used during WWII. The mission of these recruitment posters was to mobilize the nation for total war. That is why the most common slogan on these posters were as follows: “Have you enlisted as a volunteer in the army? Join the ranks of the people’s militia!”

Honour, patriotism, and images of strong and proud men and women were (and still are) used to inspire young people and to entice them into enlistment stations. Nowadays, techniques similar to those outlined above are used. Currently, the majority of army recruitment posters have a patriotic theme. However, there are other topics and methods use, such as portraying a military career as a delightful adventure and an opportunity to achieve higher social status.

Modern mobilizing posters such as the example in Figure 16 depict men and women who are smiling and confident and calling people to their ranks to work for the benefit of the state.

<sup>20</sup> Source: [http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/mincult\\_old/uk/publish/article/395679;jsessionid=BC29AA6D901F9D23599E76B208B02FA0.app1](http://mincult.kmu.gov.ua/mincult_old/uk/publish/article/395679;jsessionid=BC29AA6D901F9D23599E76B208B02FA0.app1)





**Figure 16.** Ukr: *Vstupai do lav samooborony Maïdanu* [Join the ranks of the Maidan self-defence] (left).<sup>21</sup>

Both “DPR” and Ukrainian posters have begun to use the same WWII symbols with different aims. One example is the ribbon of Saint George. In 2005 in Russia, the ribbon has come to be worn as a symbol of remembrance of the Eastern Front veterans of WWII. Since 2014, it has become widely popular among Kremlin loyalist groups. Some inhabitants of the south-eastern part of Ukraine, as well as members of the Donbass People’s Militia, apply the ribbon as a sign of pro-Russian and separatist sentiment. In Ukraine, this ribbon is sarcastically called the “Colorado ribbon”, as it is reminiscent of the destructive Colorado potato beetle with black and orange strips on its back (Berdy, 2014). Extreme Russian patriots, the occupying Russian army, and pro-Russian separatists in Donbas have become humiliatingly labelled with the lexical item *kolorad* (“Colorado”). This metaphor is widely used in pro-Ukrainian posters, sometimes with aggressive slogans such as “Don’t pass by. Kill!” that were typical for WWII posters (Figure 17).



**Figure 17.** Rus: *Ne prokhodi mimo* (top), *Ubei* (down) [Don’t pass by (top). Kill! (down)].<sup>22</sup>



**Figure 18.**<sup>23</sup>

These kinds of posters are meant to ridicule the enemy, and therefore prove their insolence, worthlessness, and vulnerability. They work for both the pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian sides.

Another widespread symbol that is differently used in “DPR” and Ukrainian posters is the Russian Bear. Since the eighteenth century, in European caricature and journalistic rhetoric, the

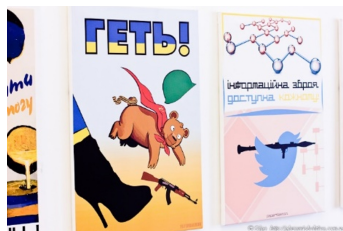
<sup>21</sup> Source: <https://io.ua/29552519> (Photo by Olha Trokhymchuk)

<sup>22</sup> Source: <https://io.ua/29552538> (Photo by Olha Trokhymchuk).

<sup>23</sup> Source: <https://io.ua/29534198> (Photo by Olha Trokhymchuk).



bear has been a stable attribute of the Russian state and a substitute for its supreme ruler (Tsar-Emperor-Secretary General-President) (Khrustal'ev, 2011, p. 137). Since this symbol is related to the Russian Empire, the former Soviet Union, and the contemporary Russian Federation, it is portrayed as an enemy on pro-Ukrainian posters. The negative attitude to this animal is shown in the actions — the bear is beaten and hit, accompanied by slogans “Go away!” (Figure 19) and “Do not open your mouth to the neighbouring land” (Figure 20). In the meantime, people in Russia appreciate the bear for its raw power and cunning, and bears are used on “DPR” military posters as well (Figure 21). On these posters, the animal is a metaphor for Russians, and the slogan refers to the Russian idiom “Do not wake the beast in me” (Rus: *Ne budi vo mne zveria*).<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 19.** Ukr: *Het!* [Go away!] (middle).<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 20.** Rus: *a sosednii kraj past' ne otkryvai* [Do not open your mouth to the neighbouring land].<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 21.** Rus: *Ne stoit budit' russkogo medvedia* [Do not wake up a Russian bear].<sup>27</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

In summary, Second World War imagery and symbols have been actively used in the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian cyberwar. Both sides are attempting to depict the most significant historical episodes relating to victories and heroism. In both pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian posters, the line between “friends” and “foes” is clearly marked: there is a string of negative descriptions of the “foes” or “not ours”, and positive images of sworn brothers. Moreover, poster artists use visual metaphors to help promote patriotic behaviour and public deeds.

Since Victory Day supports the narrative of Russian being a world power, the imagery and symbols of WWII are actively used in pro-Russian posters. The Ukrainian government is marked as a “fascist junta” and Ukrainian Armed Forces are characterized as “fascists and Nazis”. “DPR” posters sometimes use original WWII posters, changing some small details (for instance, adding a Ukrainian flag on the soldier’s chevron).

Ukrainian Soviet posters of WWII appealed to national symbols, a heroic past, folklore, and artistic heritage. This made them very popular among the population and they became a powerful lever of ideological influence on public consciousness. Currently, artists tend to use Cossack symbols, as well as images of the most significant Ukrainian writers and poets. Modern pro-Ukrainian military posters refer to World War II posters focusing on duty, patriotism, and recruitment. The themes are borrowed from Soviet images as well as from American and British material.

Posters in the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war do not only play a crucial role in defining identity, but also tend to appeal to emotions, both negative and positive. Negative feelings, such as hate, fear, and fury are directed towards enemies and positive ones like patriotism and duty are felt towards friends and brotherhoods.

<sup>24</sup> English idiom equivalents are as follows: *Don't drive me wild*, *Let sleeping dogs lie*.

<sup>25</sup> Source: <https://io.ua/29552501> (Photo by Olha Trokhymchuk).

<sup>26</sup> Source: <https://io.ua/29552548> (Photo by Olha Trokhymchuk)

<sup>27</sup> Source: <http://novosti.dn.ua/news/269201-v-donecke-pokazaly-kak-studenty-agytryuyut-za-dnr#>

This paper opens the discussion about memory policies in the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian conflict in the Donbas region. In my future research, I intend to concentrate on the investigation of the aforementioned topic in other discourses and genres (films, social media texts, news, and interviews). Moreover, the analysis of memory politics in different cultures and historical settings could also prove fruitful for further investigations.

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